OUR VIEW

GT 3/11/04

An amicable divorce

Working toward the separation of marriage and state

President Bush's politically calculated decision to endorse the idea, if not necessarily the particular wording, of an amendment to the U.S. Constitution banning same-gender marriages, was wrong-headed for reasons well beyond the inadvisability of using the fundamental document defining the scope of government to regulate personal relationships at the national level.

But both sides in this cultural conflict are approaching the issue incorrectly, seeking the sanction of government in areas that should be matters of personal choice.

What we should be working toward — indeed, perhaps the only way to resolve the issue without needless wrangling and corrosive hostility — is separation of marriage and state. There is little reason for government to have to give its permission, through the issuance of a license, when two people decide to get married. If they want to have the union blessed by a religious or secular institution, it should be up to that particular institution to decide whether or not to bless it, not the government.

Yes, yes, we know. There are certain privileges of marriage granted by government, such as joint filing of income taxes, inheritance rights and even Social Security survivor benefits, that are in most cases now denied to same-gender couples and that such couples believe should be available to them under the constitutional doctrine of equal protection. But most such arrangements can be worked out privately.

Some couples sign prenuptial agreements, which are not part of the traditional marriage process, and in general the courts have little problem enforcing them on the rare occasions when disputes arise. Similar arrangements could be worked out for other obligations and responsibilities of marriage, with very few exceptions.

Marriage is the most fundamental institution in human society, created over centuries and millennia of custom and experience and rooted in love and the desire to care for children. These characteristics will not disappear however government authorities may tinker.

Marriage will endure regardless of whether the U.S. government or the U.S. Constitution approves or disapproves, or tries to define it according to the temporal preferences of a particular era.

Rather than increase government involvement in marriage, we should be working to reduce it. Far from devaluing or denigrating marriage, this approach could strengthen it.

ild grow into confident 12-year-old

exactly why we did it. ke we could provide home for kids."

- Danea Ficek's adoptive mother

ad adopted two infants, y, through private agen-

vas considering adopting to fill the gap between hildren and Tyler and e 4 and 2, when Danea me.

exactly why we did it. I could provide a stable Jone said. "We're Chris- lled. It comes in the form

sked about Danea, a rep- social services said they ledge to adopt her before wo other families backed and social services didn't through that experience

nd Danea started getting her slowly, starting with s foster home.

ll stand out in my memo- o a house and meet this promised to take," Glenn her from the start. She te girl who had possibili-

irl was so nervous she school sick.

at seems like a good fami- ea said.

he Ficeks and Danea had heir home.

Now, almost five years later, Danea is an outgoing sixth-grader in Greeley. She plays volleyball and enjoys reading and writing. She wants to be an author or a teacher.

She still struggles with the scars from her younger years.

She is assertive and throws temper tantrums. After a recent argument with her mother, Jone asked her to write down why she was so mad.

"She wrote 'I am angry because I don't feel anyone loves me,'" Jone said.

The biggest challenge has been managing Danea's anger and teaching her to be angry without throwing or hitting, Glenn said.

He developed a system in which she can earn rewards such as sleepovers for appropriate behavior and in which there are consequences for bad behavior.

Jone said it is essential for foster parents to have a strong marriage and stable family before taking on a foster child.

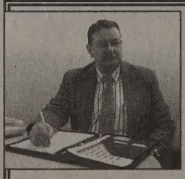
"Kids who come from upheaval create chaos just to feel normal," she said.

Danea said she doesn't think much about her past.

"If I think about my father's death, I would get so mad at my parents because they didn't take care of me. They didn't spend money on family needs," she said. "Other than that, I don't think about anything else but guys."

She admits that, when she came to the Ficeks, she thought it would be temporary like the other homes. She said, however, she appreciates her father's sense of humor and how her mother takes time to talk to her.

"I'm kind of glad it lasted," she said. "I have a place to come home to and a place to call my own."



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EXPANDED BENEFITS

City is attempting to do right thing for employees

GT 2/5/04

Colorado Springs City Council will consider adding a health insurance buy-in plan to its benefit package at the Feb. 10 meeting. Focus on the Family has weighed in against the plan. It is time for those residents in our community who have a different voice to be heard, also.

Currently, spouses and children of city employees have 75 percent of their monthly premiums paid by the city. The buy-in plan offers city employees the ability to purchase additional health insurance for interdependent family members (above and beyond spouses and children) by paying 100 percent of the cost. City staff has worked hard to create a strong benefits package. Ultimately, this helps the city meet its goal of becoming an employer of choice. This plan is fair-minded and creates a competitive benefits plan for the city. It is the right thing to do for all city employees.

Taking a more global view, passage of this plan will help create a more positive image for our city given the negative publicity we have endured since Amendment 2.

Mary Ellen McNally
Colorado Springs

RY SO FAR: With blaze and no time Ben and Mr. Brenle to get the race-afety. Through the n sees Joe Pastore by his own burn-.

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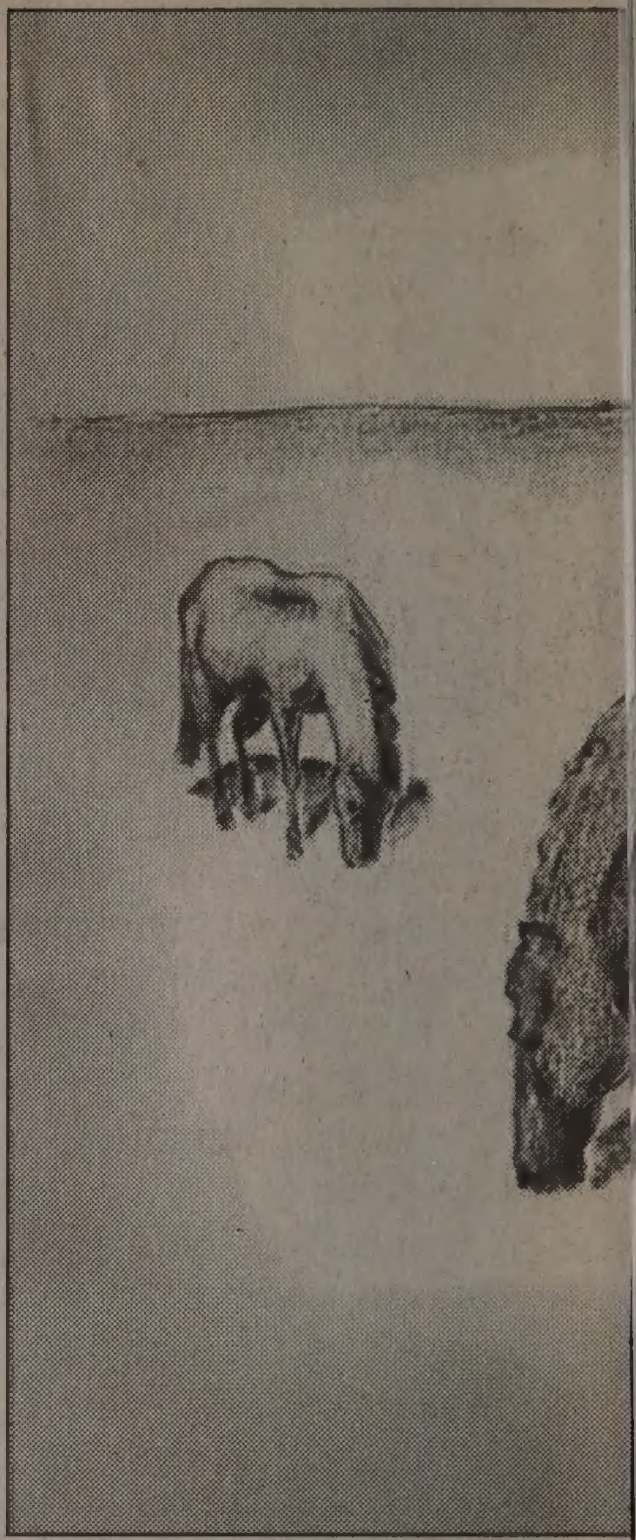
he front of the e the sound of car mming. Mr. Bren- his mouth with a



vestigator to figure that out?

Without a word, Ben stood up to follow Mr. Brennan outside, and Rachel scraped her chair back and rose also

GT 2/4/04

City benefits proposal would help families

By JERRY HEIMLICHER, RICHARD SKORMAN, SCOTT HENTE, and LARRY SMALL

Focus on the Family's Peter Brandt is certainly entitled to weigh in on the health benefit program City Council will consider at Tuesday's meeting, but we wish he would get his facts straight. Nearly every paragraph of his Feb. 4 op-ed, "Council should again reject same-sex benefits plan," contained false statements and misrepresentations.

Council already rejected same-sex domestic partner benefits last April, with no plans to bring them back. Throughout his essay, Brandt seemed to miss the point that council will be considering a very different proposal — the Qualified Adult Benefit Program. Instead of limiting benefits to same-sex couples, the new buy-in proposal would provide nonmarried city employees an opportunity to enroll a qualified adult living in their home into the city's group health plan. The catch is that they have to pay 100 percent of the premium and they must document they have lived together and have been financially interdependent.

Several of us realize that many of our employees live in nontraditional families. In fact, today an estimated 40 percent of American family households are nontraditional.

The purpose of this proposal is to provide an equal opportunity for city employees to buy affordable health insurance for an adult dependent in their home.

We don't care if the city employee chooses to add in a nonmarried heterosexual or homosexual partner, an adult child living at home, a parent or sibling. It's none of our business.

We care about the quality of our employees' work and their dedication and service to the citizens of Colorado Springs.

Brandt also brought up the potential for an increased financial risk to taxpayers because of the possibility of an increase in claims from the new enrollees. Employees' claims aren't paid by taxpayers; they are paid by the employees themselves through their own claims pool because they are self-insured. Three of the four insurance experts surveyed said that there could be a very slight risk to that claims pool from adding parents to the group. If Brandt is truly concerned about financial risk, he should argue to remove parents from the program.

Moreover, this program will increase the number of people insured, which in turn will help reduce the cost of uninsured care at our city-owned Memorial Hospital.

Finally, Brandt stated that this proposal violates "the trust residents placed in current council members during the 2003 election." A recent scientific poll of 300 Colorado Springs citizens who voted in the city's 2003 election proves the opposite. Only 11 percent of the respondents said that their opposition to the domestic partner issue was the reason they voted for a candidate. A surprising 71 percent of those same voters said they supported this new program, even though many of those same respondents were opposed to the Same Sex Benefit Program.

We don't understand why Focus on the Family won't support this program as do other religious and civic leaders. The voters overwhelmingly support it. Its costs will be carefully monitored. It provides an opportunity to all family members, without giving special benefits to anyone. And it allows a few additional members of our community to have access to affordable health care. We were frankly surprised to hear that Focus on the Family opposed this plan.

Skorman is vice mayor of Colorado Springs. Hente, Heimlicher and Small serve on the City Council.

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GT 2/4/04

Council should again reject same-sex benefits plan

By PETER BRANDT

The Colorado Springs City Council may soon consider major changes to the city's employee health care plan. The proposed changes are financially irresponsible and illustrate how out of touch city officials are with residents. More than that, though, they represent a violation of the trust residents placed in current council members during the 2003 election.

Voters may recall the decision by the then-City Council in late 2002 to provide next-to-no-cost health care benefits to the same-sex partners of homosexual city workers. A KOAA-TV survey at the time found that nearly three-fourths of Colorado Springs residents objected to the council's action.

The subsequent election in March 2003 was a mandate to overturn this regretful decision — only one candidate who publicly supported homosexual benefits was elected. One of the new council's first items of business in April was to overturn the special health care coverage by an 8-to-1 vote.

But those friendly to the homosexual agenda have found a way around the will of the people. Under the package now before the council, same-sex partners of homosexual employees could get access to health care benefits, although they would have to pay a monthly premium this time around.

The problem is the cost of the premium would not cover the actual health care costs — a fact confirmed by the city's consultants and its human relations department. Taxpayers would be required to cover the difference, and in a bizarre leap of logic, supporters of the plan claim that raising the premiums to cover the actual costs would put the city at even more financial risk. This is what's known as "new math."

But even if all the city's health care costs were covered by the premiums, this plan remains a horrendously bad idea for three reasons.

First, it is highly discriminatory. Only homosexual employees would be eligible to extend benefits to non-relatives. Rights extended to someone on the basis of their sexual orientation are called special rights — and complex legalese of the type found in the details of the city's plan doesn't alter this fact.

Second, the plan ignores the importance of the traditional family. Traditional marriage between one man and one woman has served as the foundation of society for millennia. Every time elected officials tinker with the definition of family, the economic, social and emotional costs are tremendous — just look at no-fault divorce. Social engineering has been and will always be a disaster.

If Colorado Springs really wants to extend special health care benefits to attract talent, why not do so in a way that helps the traditional family? Why not cover the costs of an adult son or daughter just entering the workforce with a company that does not provide health care? Why not offer benefits to the retired city employee not yet old enough to collect Social Security? Why not help cover the costs of medicine for the live-in elderly parent who cannot afford supplemental insurance?

To be sure, the proposed plan has tried to create the impression of providing benefits to these other groups. But the people who really need it — the elderly and adult children — can't get them. And that makes this plan a farce.

Third, our culture is on a slippery slope relative to the homosexual agenda. In every city and at every corporation where special benefits have been created for homosexuals, it has prompted demands for additional benefits in the name of "fairness" and "tolerance."

Our City Council should not be confused by this line of argument. What's at issue here isn't "fairness" or "tolerance" for any group of Colorado Springs residents except those voters who have clearly stated they don't want to pay for a health care plan like the one now before the council.

Taxpayers want the council to maintain roads, attract jobs, manage growth, protect safety and the like, not to redefine the meaning of marriage and family.

Brandt is director of issues response for Focus on the Family. The ministry's analysis of the health care proposal can be found at www.citizenlink.org.

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